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U. S. Air Force Oral History Interview

with

General W. Y. Smith

MICROFILMED BY ISAM

AIR FORCE
HISTORICAL RESEARCH AGENCY
Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

K239.0512-2040

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RETURN TO
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UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interview

of

GENERAL W. Y. SMITH

MICROFILMED BY ISAM

By

Mr. Hugh N. Ahmann
April 1990 - April 1996

Transcribed & Edited by
Faye Davis

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FOREWORD

One of the oldest and oft-used sources for reconstructing the past is the personal recollections of the individuals who were involved. While of great value, memoirs and oral interviews are primary source documents rather than finished history. The following pages are the personal remembrances of the interviewee and not the official opinion of the US Air Force Historical Program or of the Department of the Air Force. The Air Force has not verified the statements contained herein and does not assume any responsibility for their accuracy.

These pages are a transcript of an oral interview recorded on magnetic tape. Editorial notes and additions made by US Air Force historians have been enclosed in brackets. Only minor changes for the sake of clarity were made before the transcript was returned to the interviewee for final editing and approval. Readers must therefore remember that this is a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

BIOGRAPHY
OF
GENERAL W. Y. SMITH

General Smith was born 13 August 1925 in Hot Springs, Arkansas, where he graduated from high school in 1943. He spent one year at Washington and Lee University in Virginia and then entered the US Military Academy at West Point NY. He graduated in 1948, among the first academy graduates commissioned directly into the newly established Air Force. He received a master of public administration degree in 1954 and a doctorate in political economy and government in 1961, both from Harvard University. He completed Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB AL, in 1959 and National War College, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington DC, in 1965.

His first assignment was training recruits at Lackland AFB TX. Subsequently, he went through flight training at Randolph AFB TX and Williams AFB AZ, receiving his pilot wings in September 1949. He then served as a pilot with the 20th Fighter-Bomber Group at Shaw AFB SC.

In March 1951 General Smith was assigned to the 27th Fighter Escort Group at Itazuke AB, Japan, and flew combat missions over Korea in F-84 Thunderjets. He spent 2 months as a forward air controller with the US Army's 25th Infantry Division. He next joined the 49th Fighter-Bomber Group and served as operations officer for combat crew training at Itazuke, then as assistant group operations officer at Taegu AB, South Korea, flying combat missions until hit by flak and wounded on his 97th mission.

After prolonged hospitalization, General Smith attended Harvard University for graduate study in preparation for a teaching assignment with the Department of Social Sciences at the US Military Academy.

From August 1954 to July 1958, the General taught government, economic, and international relations and attained the rank of associate professor at the US Military Academy. He attended the Air Command and Staff College from August 1958 to June 1959. He spent that summer on special assignment with the President's committee to study the US Military Assistance Program, the Draper Committee. In the fall he became a planning and programming officer with the Deputy Director of War Plans in the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Plans and Programs, HQ US Air Force, Washington DC.

In July 1961 he moved to the White House as Air Force staff assistant to General Maxwell D. Taylor, who was then military representative to President John F. Kennedy. When General Taylor became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1962, General Smith worked in a dual capacity as an assistant to the Chairman, Joint

Chiefs of Staff, and as a staff member on the National Security Council under Mr. McGeorge Bundy.

General Smith went to the National War College in August 1964, and after graduation in June 1965, he was assigned to HQ US Air Forces in Europe, Lindsey Air Station, Germany. He worked first in the Policy and Negotiations Division and later as Chief, War Plans Division, both under the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations. In July 1967 he became Commander of the 603rd Air Base Wing at Sembach AB, Germany.

Following his return to the United States in July 1968, he became military assistant to the Secretary of the Air Force, serving first with Secretary Harold Brown and subsequently with Secretary Robert C. Seamans, Jr. In this position it was General Smith's job to advise and assist the Secretary on matters of substance, particularly operational, budgetary, joint service, and system acquisition matters. In addition, he carried out special projects for the Secretary.

He was appointed vice commander of the Oklahoma City Air Materiel Area, now the Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center, in August 1971, and became commander in June 1972. The center provided logistics support for USAF weapon systems that includes B-52s and associated missiles, A-7Ds, C-135s, and its configurations ranging from tankers to airborne command posts, command control communications systems, aircraft engines for major Air Force combat and airlift aircraft, and component parts for various Air Force equipment.

In October 1973 General Smith transferred to Air Force Headquarters and served as Director of Doctrine, Concepts, and Objectives in the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Plans and Operations. In July 1974 he was appointed Director of Policy Plans and National Security Council Affairs, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. He became Assistant to the Chairman, Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in September 1975.

The General returned to Europe in July 1979 as Chief of Staff for Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), Belgium. In June 1981 he became Deputy Commander in Chief, Headquarters US European Command, Stuttgart-Vaihingen, Germany, and he retired from the Air Force in August 1983.

His military decorations and awards include the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, Distinguished Service Medal (Air Force) with one oak leaf cluster (OLC), Silver Star, Legion of Merit, Air Medal with 3 OLCs, Joint Service Commendation Medal, and Purple Heart.

General Smith is married to the former Maria Petschek of New York City. They have three sons: Raymond P., Mark P., and Derek P.

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TO THE RESEARCHER

The draft transcript was never returned by General Smith; therefore, the Historical Research Agency must assume he was satisfied with the contents of this transcript. Although the editor had a few questions about some names of people and places--as is indicated throughout the transcript--this interview is too valuable to withhold from historical researchers, and the Agency is proud to add this to their collection.